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# Himalayan Times



**CAN NEPAL AFFORD TO  
BLOCK GORKHAS FROM  
INDIAN ARMY?**



**Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom  
Proverbs 1:7**

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## HIMALAYAN TIMES

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### SPY FOR TIBET FINDS KARMA IN TENNESSEE p15



I became involved with the Tibetan resistance because of my father. He was the editor of the main newspaper for the Dalai Lama's older brother, the national paper, which existed because of CIA support.... says Jamyang Norbu to Henry Hamman

### A PERFECT GETAWAY KAFFER P18

Lush green grass, Azaleas in full bloom everywhere, trees of such pixie height. It was paradise!!! That's what Kafer is.... says Prakriti Prabha Chettri

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### CAN NEPAL AFFORD TO BLOCK GORKHAS FROM INDIAN ARMY?

Amid talks of the Nepalese government trying to halt Gorkha recruitments in foreign armies, Avalok Langer details why the move is counterproductive for all parties concerned

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**Sandip C. Jain**

This article was published in this very column six years back. Despite half a dozen years having passed and change of political guards in both the local and State levels, the traffic problem in Kalimpong today remains as woeful as it was then. This article is being reproduced again, as it was published then, just to let the readers judge for themselves if “Change” or “Poribortan” that was promised both in the Local and State levels actually was of any use..

# Of cars, chaotic traffic, pied pipers (and some ingenuity .....of course )



One of the most oft repeated comments in Kalimpong is about the traffic in the town- anyone coming to this hills town after a longish period of time or coming for the first time, on seeing the chaotic traffic situation existing here is so visually shocked that the first reaction that manages to escape from him or her is a long and shock-filled “*Aambooooooooo*”. This word, of course has no equivalent in the English language but those who know the local lingo will vouch that this single word can convey more than probably what a hundred words in English cannot.

But then one can keep “*Aamboooooooooing*” till one goes blue, black, red, green, white and every other shade in the face but still then, as things stand today, the endless flow of traffic in Kalimpong and the resultant mayhem that it creates, will probably never end. The Police top brass, the administrative bosses and the political leadership have collectively put in hundreds of hours in trying to conjure up a magical solution to our traffic predicament, but all have failed.


The situation is so bad that all well wishers of Kalimpong have at some time or the other, racked their brains into trying to think of a solution to this crisis but needless to say but no one has come even remotely close to suggesting a realistic way out.

We at Himalayan Times, too had at one time taxed our brains over the matter but being the fools that we are (fools because who else would continue running a newspaper which makes a loss issue after issue, which the so called “intellects” of the region think is a rag sheet and whose editor, yes- meaning myself- is hated and shunned by most, despite the fact that Himalayan Times is the highest circulated paper in the Darjeeling Hills), we predictable came up naught.

The other day while attending some function in St. Augustines’ School; I had the privilege to watch the little children from the KG section perform a very entertaining musical representation of the “Pied Piper of Hamelin”.

Now, seeing the program has given me a brilliant idea which can rid us of our traffic woos once and for ever. The idea being, why not all of us pool in our resources to search for a similar Pied Piper who could play his pipe and “hypnotize” all cars in Kalimpong into following him into the depths of the River Teesta, never to be seen again. But of course, unlike in the original story, I hope he is paid in full (without deduction of any commissions) after he has done the job, for I love my two daughters too much to see them join the second procession that he may take out incase of any payment disputes.

The little brain that I have atop my six foot plus frame, tell me that this time I have come up with a jackpot of an idea. I hope those who are empowered to take the above decision will use my ingenious suggestion, solving the vexed problem for all times to come.

On second thoughts- after coming up with such an unmatched and inspired idea, may be I am not as big a fool as I thought I was..... 

## IMAGINING ALTERNATIVE HISTORIES OF THE NORTHEAST

# A DOSE OF HERESY

The speculation would appear to be well in order. When the British masters decided in 1937 to bestow on the natives in India the so-called provincial autonomy, in terms of Government of India Act passed two years earlier, they took alongside that an were detached: Burma and Ceylon were detached from the jurisdiction of the viceroy and governor- general of India and became separate Wings of the Empire with their own administrative set-up.

Whenever whatever takes place, it becomes a part of history. But what does not happen can also contribute to the evolution of history. At the time they separated Burma and Ceylon from British India, The rulers could have taken an an-logous decision with respect to the region now known as India's North-east: the entire sweep of territory covering pre-sent-day Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur ,Tripura a-nd Arunachal Pradesh. This hilly sub-Himalayan region mostly comprised tribal settlements that the British annex-ed either by force, or by bribery or by treaty arrangements of various descriptions with chiefs, chieftains and, as in the case of puny kingdoms ruled by Hindu royalty, Manipur and Tripura. Inhabitants of this region had, by and large little in common with the people of the Indo- Genetic valley or the Deccan in terms of religious affiliation language food habits, apparel or culture in the broadest sense.

Christian missionaries of many denominations had, over a couple of centuries, carried out conversion among some tribes ; several other tribes persisted with their Buddhist rituals, while quit a few practiced this or that version of paganism; There is reference to a Kingdom of its princess, chitrangada, in the Mahabharata. But apart from other things, there were any number of minor Kingdoms dispersed all over the country bearing the same name. Thanks to a temporary flurry of intrusion on the part of the Vaisnava cult, the curiosum of the Bengali script has lingered In Manipur. The Tripura princely family had also some cultural links with Bengal. None of these made the least difference; the ethnic and cultural chasm between the region and the rest of the Indian sub continent did not narrow.

European rulers were generally aware of the widely heterogeneous ethnic, culture, religious and linguistic mix among the people they conquered in south Asia, particularly in the southern slope of the Himalayas. The phenomenon, they gradually realized, called for carefully crafted political strategy

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and administrative modality. As the British rulers processed along the learning curve; viceroys and governors-general based in New Delhi, it was felt, should be released of the burden of Burma and Ceylon. For whatever reason, the accumulation of territory currently known as the North-eastern was left out of the 1937 schedule of re-aligning political geography. The viceroy remained in overall charge of these remote, hilly stretches of tribal settlements. His dues ex machine for administering the region was to deal directly with the tribal chiefs, chieftains and prince lings exercising control over their respective fiefs. The provincial government, with its ministers chosen by the elected representatives of the people of Assam, was precluded from intruding into this sphere of the governor's ambit of responsibilities.

The governor was vested with special powers to deal with the administrative issues cropping up from time to time in the northeast; he received directives from, and reported back to, the viceroy and governor-general in new Delhi. The dual role of the Governor-as representative of the British crown monitoring the progress of provincial autonomy in Assam and simultaneously as presiding deity of the tribal belt- was somewhat confusing. The masters in London could have

easily handed over the whole area now constituting the North-east to the charge of a separately appointed governor or governor-general. Perhaps the Chittagong Hill Tracts, nominally ruled by the chakma royalty, could also have been tagged to this new entity. A further decision might have even thrown in the port town of Chittagong too, so as to ensure a sea access to the otherwise land-locked, newly established colony.

Indian nationalists did not make a squeak when the announcement was made in 1937 to exclude Burma and Ceylon from the jurisdiction of and New Delhi. The Burmese and the Ceylonese people were never reckoned as Indian's by activists fighting for Indian's freedom; so how these two imperial possessions were governed by the masters did not concern the Indian National Congress and its acolytes. If yet another entity were carved out by the secretary of state for Indian London comprising the remote North east, and turned into yet another separated colony, the reaction of the nationalists in Aryavarta would conceivably have been no different, and possibly more or less as follows: that wretched region was settled in by people mostly of mongoloid extraction who had little in common with us Indians; they were no part of the Indians nation and the

nation's freedom movement; how the British government dealt with them was no business of ours.

Bengalis in to town of Chittagong and villages might have felt mind voice would have been much 90 feeble to be taken notice of. Besides till the close of the second WORLD WAR, the concept of anti-colonialism had a several parochial character.

There could have been a third alternative. Instead of creating yet another corpus, London could have decided to join the Northeast with Burma, which in any case, was marked by intricate tribal heterogeneity; attachment of the North eastern tracts would merely have added a few extra hues to its ethnic landscape. Indian nationalists could not have cared less.

It did not happen on any of these ways. The Northeast remained in the charge of the viceroy and governor-General. When transfer of power took place in 1947, those assuming authority in New Delhi were handed over, as a matter of course, suzerainty over the entire region, almost in the manner Bombay was once transferred to the British crown by another European royal family reportedly as marriage dowry. In the popular Indian imagination, the Northeast has since been more like a prized-almost colonial-possession. The logic applied is frighteningly straightforward: these people up there are different; they look like a strange lot and speak differently; they look like a straight lot and speak differently, their religious particles belong to odd categories, they were formerly ruled by the viceroy and governor-general; the error-general; the new regime in New Delhi had inherited all powers over what constituted British India minus the area that had gone to Pakistan, the Northeast thereby automatically belonged to India, Priced.

This point of view is not articulated in loud words, but it is the dominant idea among citizens in the rest of India. The Government in New Delhi has also, right from the beginning, faithfully mirrored, perhaps absent mindedly, the prevalent mass sentiment. The basic attitude could not be more supercilious; these quaint people have been left to our care by the British, we need to be both paternal and patronizing with them; undoubtedly they have special problems; as benign guardians we of course would try to sympathize with them and sort out their difficulties; on their part, they too have to appreciate the fact that New Delhi has a great number of other headaches; they should be good boys, dutifully obey the headmaster; ah yes, they must visit the nation's capital on Republic Day when a gala festival of tribal dancers would be put on show; they must promise to make it a thundering success.

Two generations have sprung since the distance middle decades since the distance middle decades of the last century. The kind of relationship the centre presumed to impose unilaterally on

the people in the Northeast has led to deep resentment. At the same time, many of the territories making up the region have undergone significant shifts in terms of human geography with a steady stream of migrants from the plains, which has contributed to new tensions. Of the much greater significance is the claimed strategic indispensability of the northeast for India's external security and massive investments by the centre to strengthen the defence and economic infrastructure.

While such investments have gone on, the living conditions of the tribal people have remained unchanged, unsprings of different dimensions have been the regular pattern. The first revolt is now was in what Nagaland, then it was the turn of Mizoram, subsequently it was Manipur, which has actually been continuously on the boil. At some stage, Tripura too was touch and go. The authorities in New Delhi have been in sense fortunate. The disturbances have been spread over time; there was no simultaneous, integrate rebellion on the other hand, while things are apparently quite in Nagaland at the moment, the basic issues are yet to be resolved; New Delhi is having with Naga rebel leaders currently based in Bangkok and elsewhere.

Arunachal Pradesh, earlier designated as the Northeast Frontier Agency, has an additional problem: China is yet to accept the McMahon Line as sacrosanct. Manipur, in any event, is in state of permanent turmoil. The elected state government is hardly in positions to cope with the consequences of the hurt the Armed Services (Special Powers) Act have caused to the psyche of ordinary people; intra-tribal feuds are saving the situation from getting worse.

Boys and girls from the north-eastern region have little option but travel to 'India', to all purpose a foreign land to them, for higher studies. Residents of the places where they billet often treat them as an inferior species. Superiority complex takes over; these boys and girls often become victims of irresponsible dalliances or butt of not so innocent pranks. Tragic incidents become frequent. Aggravating haughtiness on the part of the defence forces personnel back home, the increasing phenomenon of unbridled corruption of small time politicians in New Delhi's good books and the felling of claustrophobic isolation in mainland India coalesce to make the environment worse every day. As in Kashmir the more the Indian army digs in, alienation from the heartbeat of India worsens further.

Would it not have been a different kind of history if the masters in London had decided for the Northeast the same sort of arrangement as they did for Burma without the headache of running a colony, and Myanmar and another sovereign country as their neighbor.

Die-hard patriots would be scandalized by the speculation. Nonetheless, heretical talk now and then is a good for a nation's not an altogether anti-social pastime. ■

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# Can Nepal Afford to Block Gorkhas from Indian Army?

*Amid talks of the Nepalese government trying to halt Gorkha recruitments in foreign armies, Avalok Langer details why the move is counterproductive for all parties concerned*

**THERE WAS** a sudden flash and everything went silent. Dazed, I found myself flat on my back,

In August 1989, Lance Naik Thilak Bahadur Rai had been deployed with his unit 1/11 Gorkha Rifles in Sri Lanka as a part of the

30,000 Nepalese Gorkhas currently serve in the Indian Army.



staring at a body falling to the ground. As the gunfire rattled the silence, I realised I was surrounded and that five of my fellow soldiers had been blown up by the LTTE claymore mine. As the bullets flew, I thought to myself: ‘*Ya toh marna hai, ya maarna hai*’ (Either I kill, or get killed). I switched to single shot and took out five LTTE combatants.”

Indian Peace-keeping Force (IPKF). In that encounter with the LTTE, the now retired Thilak eventually took out 13 enemy fighters, while gathering the wounded of his own unit. For his bravery, this young Gorkha from Diktil in Nepal, who later also fought in the Kargil War, was awarded the Vir Chakra.

Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw had famously said, “If a man says he is not afraid of dying, he is either lying or is a Gorkha.” Known for their battlefield tenacity and fierce loyalty,

However, further recruitment of Nepalese Gorkhas into the Indian and British Armies (which started with the Britain-India-Nepal Tripartite Agreement of 1947) is under a cloud. Based on the recommendation issued by a Parliamentary Committee on International Relations and Human Rights on 26 December 2011, Nepal has directed the ministries concerned to halt the recruitment of Gorkhas by foreign



armies. This demand had first come up as a part of the 50-point agenda the Maoists submitted to the government when they went underground in 1996.

“Nowhere in the world do you see a system like this. Times have changed from the Empire days. The Gorkhas are taken from Nepal as raw material and used by another country to meet their purposes in exchange for money; there is no value addition. They may be given medals and honours, but it is a form of modern-day slavery that questions the sovereignty of Nepal,” says Amrita Thapa of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (M).

Deepak Bhatt of CPN-UML says although there is nothing wrong with Nepali youth getting jobs abroad, “if the committee feels, we should re-look the age-old agreement. Even if it impacts relations with India”.

Surprisingly, this move finds support from the Indian Gorkhas, who have always felt sidelined. “Being Indian citizens, they feel they should be given preference over Nepalese Gorkhas,” says a senior officer in the Indian Army.

But not all are in favour of this move in Nepal. Sources in the Nepali Congress suggest this is simply political posturing by the Maoists. “At some level, it is an attempt to appease the hardliners in the party, but I don’t think much will come of it. The Gorkha groups and other political parties are not in favour of this being passed.”

Even Naik (retd) Om Bahadur Thapa of 5/9 GR, puts the report down to political posturing. “Certain sections in the political domain are opposed to



the idea of the Nepalese serving another country, saying it is a form of slavery; I don’t agree. I wanted to join the Indian Army of my own choice.” When asked if it ever felt odd fighting for another country, Thapa says, “No, India and Nepal are like brothers. Nepal is my home, but so is India. I never felt I was in another country.” Honorary Subedar Major (retd) Tirath Bahadur Rai of 3/11 GR, who was with the IPKF, fought in Kargil and against the Northeast insurgencies, says, “My father and uncles served in the British India Army. A sense of duty and pride was instilled in us. We only thought of service to the nation. After 30 years in India, I have a sense of belonging. All this is just politics.”

Retired Gorkha servicemen, whether from India or Britain, echo the sentiments. And given the strong bond men share with their units abroad, it is perhaps easy to understand this concern. But with employment constraints in Nepal, financial security is also equally important.

“Known as Bhu Puus (*bhut purva*, or former), there are 1,24,000 ex-servicemen in Nepal from the Indian Army and allied services, who receive Rs 1,300 crore annually as pension,” explains an Indian Army officer. Add to that the salary of existing Gorkhas in the Indian Army, which is a little more than the pension, around Rs 2,600 crore is sent back to Nepal as remittances.

This amount is roughly a tenth of Nepal’s annual budget. If you factor in the Rs 715 crore (£87 million) that the UK government sends to Nepal every year, not counting remittances, this is a figure that no government can choose to ignore.

It doesn’t stop at salaries. The Rai cousins, Thilak and Tirath, are in Kathmandu to pick up equipment supplied by the Indian government to bring water to their village. “After retiring in 2008, I was worried. In the unit, everything was taken care of, but I didn’t know what to expect here in Nepal. But all our needs have been met,” says Tirath Rai. Through its embassy and military wing, India has set up elaborate welfare and medical schemes that cover the pensioners and their families. From education and housing grants to schools, libraries and water systems, the Indian government has done more for the Bhu Puus than even the local administration.

The withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Iraq and Afghanistan has had a bearing on the demand for retired Gorkhas to fill in the gaps. A few thousand Gorkhas from the Indian Army are serving abroad, post-retirement. “In 2007, I went to


Afghanistan for four years, providing security to water pipelines for the US and NATO troops,” says Subedar (retd) Arun Subba of 11 GR. He adds: “I went because I wanted to travel abroad and I needed money to build my house and educate my children.” It was the same for Subedar (retd) Prem Bahadur, who provides security for a NATO camp in Kandahar, “It is a good job option. In Nepal or India, I would never be able to make this kind of money.”

In 2002, at the height of insurgency in J&K’s Doda district, an officer told this correspondent a WWII story:

“Towards the end of the war, a battalion of Gorkhas was asked to volunteer for an important mission behind enemy lines for the Allies in Europe. A British officer explained to the battalion: ‘It is crucial that you secure the



position. You’ll be dropped into enemy territory from an aircraft at 1,200 feet.’ The Gorkha commanding officer asked anyone who wanted to volunteer to take one step forward. Only half the men did so. Shocked, the British officer said to the CO, ‘I thought the Gorkhas were supposed to be the bravest. I didn’t expect this, especially since it isn’t a particularly dangerous job.’ ‘True,’ said the Gorkha officer. ‘But half of them have volunteered to jump from 1,200 feet. Perhaps you should tell them they’ll have parachutes too.’

A fictitious bar room story, but it captures the unquestioning loyalty of the Gorkha. Given the situation in Nepal and the value these soldiers command internationally, it doesn’t seem likely that their recruitment to the Indian Army will stop any time soon. 

*Avalok Langer is a Correspondent with Tehelka.*

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# KALIMPONG IN 50s

## LIFE WAS LIKE THAT...

Col (Retd) Mani K. Gahatraj

*History is lived forward, We know the end before we consider the beginning,*

*But we can never really know, What it was in the begning!*

*Wedge wood, William the Silent*

The wheel of time moves slowly but surely churning events and people across the labyrinth of past, present and future. Ever since the beginning of time itself, as minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years and centuries roll on and move continuously, towards infinity, beyond the barriers of space and time, the past keeps moving away further and further, getting dimmer and dimmer from the rusty and faded memories of humans; when finally a point is reached when zillions of single events that would have occurred in some person's life, alive and kicking at a time and place, would be memories or stories years later, albeit in distorted version. These memories perhaps blink for one last time in the rusty and fading grey cells of old and infirm before it is consigned into the dustbin of life when the life itself is extinguished forever. However, chronicles of events written in the beginning of known and unknown civilizations have stayed on defying the vagaries of change and have lived to tell its tale to a future generation unknown and unconceived.

It is in this kind of context of unstoppable time and space that when I survey the hustle and bustle of life in Kalimpong of today amidst the concrete jungle of crowded town buildings and fancy shops, amidst the cyber cafes and whiz-buzz gizmos of technologies, amidst the razzle-dazzle and hip-hop fashion of the 21st century, my not so faded memories take me back to my own "boyish" times of the 50s, the Kalimpong of midnight children as my generation were born during the period of great Indian Independence Era within the four walls of our parent's bedrooms



as "Home Deliveries" were the order of the day, those days.

### The Impression of a School Boy.

Early 50s were the end of the British Era and the beginning of independent India. In my memories as a school boy, Kalimpong was a laid back and sleepy little village town, unimaginable to the generation of today. Those were the days of peace and tranquility; the hills were beautiful, not at all populated and polluted, only dotted with beautiful villas, cottages, thatched huts and small buildings unlike the concrete jungle of today. I used to see roses, geraniums, chrysanthemums, gladioli and orchids flowers spraying riot of colors from the home gardens, balconies and verandahs. Along the countryside were green terraced paddy and corn fields, while smoke puffing thatched huts surrounded by colorful flower and vegetable gardens were perfect balance of tranquility and peace. Lingering but pleasant presence of British

legacy, as visible with many "white people" still around town specially in missionary schools and hospitals who lived in their English and Scottish cottages in Mission Compound over the town, Dr Graham's Homes, St Augustine's School and St Joseph's Convent and St Philomena School in 8th Mile area. Today's famous Swiss cheese available in my friend Pran's Larks, was pioneered by the Swish Missionaries in 7th Mile area before I was born. It would be almost impossible for the TV, internet, laptop, cell phone and iPod generation of today to even remotely fathom the ways of the world

of Kalimpong of 50s and 60s. In those days the Main road used to be almost silent except for the movement of school children during the mornings and late afternoons. The crowded and congested Main Roads of today where Maruties, Traveras, Santos, Sumos, Boleros and Scorpios wheeze past every minute, there used to ply just few Morris, Austin, Hillman, Landrovers and old Ford and Chevrolet trucks alongside bullock carts, horses and mules.

**The Saturday Special.** Just like these days Saturday have always been a special day in Kalimpong with "Haat" in the morning and football matches in the afternoon with matinee shows in "Novelty" and "Kanchan" cinema halls squeezed in between. As against 24X7



internet chatting & romance, virtual net dating and net marriage of today, Saturdays were the only days for dating for the romantic teenagers, for whom rendezvous used to be the famous “Park” or “Durpeen” or “Delo” areas. The day’s romance used to finally culminate in one of the cinema halls where holding hands occasionally, when heads were not turning around, used to be the ultimate goal. The very feeling of going to Saturday Haat, eating “langysa momo” for 4 annas or “singada” and tea for 3 annas and follow-up by a great football match or a “cowboy” movie of James Dean, Gregory Peck, Rock Hudson, John Wayne, Tony Curtis or war movie of Audi Murphy.

**The Gang:** While in class 8th, we had a gang of “good” students led by the protective leader, Himal Khati, where in our specialty was to raid fruits orchard of plums and peaches from the big bungalow gardens of Durpin Area. The strategy was, Himal the leader, would walk to the bungalow most confidently and start chatting with the mali/ chowkidar and the rest of us would fill up our bags with fruits. We then used to move by stealth to a place and call Himal by a prefixed whistle signal. Thereafter it was a sumptuous fruit picnic in a spot overlooking the town. Thereafter it was either a football match or movie.

**The Revisit.** In June 2007, at 60 plus, after 37 military years, 5 years in the banking service and a year of roaming around the Hindu Kush Mountains, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and places around the world, when I received an invitation to attend the centenary celebrations of my Alma matter, SUMI Primary School, I found myself visiting the same class rooms after 50 years plus. It was the same assembly hall, where the demise of King George the 6th was announced by the Headmaster, saying the king in whose empire sun never sets is no more. We used to stand bare feet and sing Christian hymns in Nepali, same class rooms where I learnt letters and words by keeping pebbles and corn on top of the alphabets written in chalk on the wooden floor by our teachers. As I walked the doors of our old classrooms I experienced a “major blast from the past” and I could vividly recall the events that took place in those class rooms 50 years ago. I remember how I slowly and steadily progressed from “pebble (“dhoonga”) and corn (Makati)” classes to higher classes along with my steady friends like Rishi, Pran, Gautam, Sahadev, Lasukbu, Nirmal and so many others. On reaching class four we were officially allowed to write in “Ink” and proudly used to carry “Sulekha” Ink Bottle and a



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pen to the school, needless to say that our hands used to be smeared with ink. On reaching class 7, like most of the boys, I started wearing shoes to the school and at class Eight I wore my first pant. Of course there was no school uniform; it was happiness with shorts and bare feet. I was thrilled, to once again touch the old benches and desks in old class rooms, bearing age old marks of carved writings and sketches drawn by little hands using compass and dividers of the “tin geometry boxes” 50-60 years ago still in use. I also remembered our great masters, Rev Scott, the Principal, Longman Sir, Leela Sir, Barbes Sir, who used to hit our shinbones with military boots, Lalchand Sir who used to sell stationery to the students as we joined new classes after the winter holidays, Dhanraj sir and many others. Most of those teachers used to live in nearby Mission Compound’s teacher’s quarters, known as “Barah Dhurah”. Leonard Sir used to narrate Bible stories during our compulsory Bible classes of third period like the “Action movies” of today. I also saw the craft classrooms where we used to make ropes out of “Hathi bar trees”. The playing fields are still there where we used to run down the slopes to play volley ball and football. The places

where vendors, “Chanawalas” and “biscuitwalas” used to sell us “chanas”, “matars” biscuits for one annas or two annas.

**The Tibetan Connection.** One of the striking memories of my young days as a school boy in Kalimpong is the Tibetan mule caravans decorated with colorful regalia and musical bells around their necks, accompanied by Tibetan men in their traditional “Bakkhus” with prayer wheels in their hands and “OM MANI PEME HOM” in their lips, walking along the road side. The mule train used to be guarded jealously by small but ferocious Tibetan dogs with bells hung around their collar, however, as I recollect, those dogs were only minding the mules and never did they threaten or disturb the people passing by. During winter months these mule and horse caravans used to be quite heavy and we used to see empty spaces along the road side dotted with Tibetan tents. I guess we will never see such beautiful and innocent environment ever again. Like Stephen King says in his Dark Tower series, “The world has indeed moved on”.

**The “Chuppi” & Legends.** Just like in the rest of the hills, people of Kalimpong also refer distances by kilometers and places by Miles and 10th Mile was the most dangerous area in town with fearsome Khamba Tibetans roaming the street in their “Bakkhus” carrying “Chuppi” (short sword) in silver scabbard across their kamarbandhs. There used to be cases of midnight brawls, as we used to hear in the school the next day, where people used to be stabbed and even killed. Even the “Gundas” of those days were legends of sorts. There was this famous, fearsome but very smart and handsome “Samdoo” who used to be in and out of the Kalimpong jail for such

midnight escapades. However, out of jail and into the football field he was a hero to watch. There was “Achu Namgyal” who was a great goal keeper of SUMI in early 50s, but in another such brawl at 10th mile, when he tried to guard himself against the “Chuppi attack” with bare hands, his hands were damaged permanently. Such was the spirit of those days that when Achu Namgyal came out of the hospital, he returned back to the football field, this time around as a full back, and he played the game as a famous full back for a long time. The story goes that he used to use his damaged hands to pull the shorts of the forward attackers, just like Maradona’s “Little finger of God”! Another one was the famous football umpire, “Lamsingh” whose umpiring style and on field antics would put today’s international umpire to shame. Such was his style, strictness and amazingly quick gestures to show faults, matching with the rapid whistle blowing, that when Lamsingh was the umpire, the teams and the public used to be at peace that justice would be done. There was “Shorty Jangey” who used to score the winning goal in the 11th hour of the tense match and another “Fatty Jangey” whose penalty kick used to go through the net. Not forgetting the famous goalies, Shivrattan Periwai of SUMI and Bhanu Pradhan of Kumudini Homes who were famous in stopping most of the penalty kick at the overwhelming applause of the cheering crowd. Who can forget the high kicks of Gyappan sir of Kumidini Homes that used to reach the motor stand! There were so many others but one last mention has to be that of “Pemba” who used to be a loom operator in Industrial School, but such a keen player of football that his name became “Keera Kancha” meaning “football worm” and many more talented footballers.

**Page 3 People.** Perhaps the rich and famous of those days were the Macdonald family of Himalayan Hotel, Bhutanese Royals, Kazis of Sikkim and Few families of Lawyers, Doctors & Engineers who could be counted up to 10. The Royals and Nobles of Bhutan and Sikkim used to be seen galloping around in their horses with beautiful companions or drive around their imported “motor cars”. They used to be seen in cinema halls, football fields and in landmark joints such as “Gumpus”, “Sanghai” and the Himalayan Hotel. I remember that my father was quite friendly with one of the Macdonald family and we used to relish homemade jam sent by Mrs Macdonald. Who can forget the presence of famous film star, Devika Rani Roeirch who had settled down in Kalimpong with her Russian painter husband. One fine day Kalimpong was playing host to the Prince & Princes of a faraway land, Afghanistan. We were told that a dozen of very stately, dignified and beautiful ladies and gentlemen had



**Life in General. Life was lots of walking, much hard work but tension free and beautiful. We used to find great joy in small things of life like tasting ice cream for the first time in life. “Mukund Sharma” gave the first Ice-cream shop to Kalimpong during early 50s.**

been sent to Kalimpong on exile from Afghanistan. Little did I realize that I would be living and working in their ravaged land after almost 50 years and take photographs of their magnificent palace almost raged by the bombings of 35 years of war. There was “Vikkshu Sangharakshita” an English monk who used to live alone at his 9th Mile residence and used to patronize local boys helping them in studies, teaching English language etc.

**Life in General.** Life was lots of walking, much hard work but tension free and beautiful. We used to find great joy in small things of life like tasting ice cream for the first time in life. “Mukund Sharma” gave the first Ice-cream shop to Kalimpong during early 50s. We used to wear handmade shoes made by Chinese shoemakers and eat bakery items from “mobile human bakery” in a large tin box carried on the turbaned heads of “biscuitwalas” who used to sell their stuff to us kids on credit. The only political parties known were Congress and Gorkha-league but people did not care about politics. Gorkha League, with red & green flag and Khukuri, used to sweep the election. Occasional

tourists used to be the camera wielding “foreigners”, perhaps on nostalgic trip to Kalimpong. Our houses in the villages used to have flower and vegetable gardens and we grew up on rice, maize, vegetables from own land, milk from own cows, eggs and chicken from home poultry and occasional pork and mutton slaughtered at home or at neighbor’s. We ate oranges, pears, figs and bananas climbing and plucking from the trees and we walked, ran and played, jumping along the terraced fields, swimming in the little ponds of clean and not so clean streams by the mountain side, we went to the jungle on picnic, cooked and ate simple rice, dal, vegetable and country chicken, obviously boiler chicken was not even born those days.

Those days there were no Coke & Pepsi, no mineral water, no TV, no ipod and we grew up outdoors climbing rocks, playing football on the streets and fields and enjoyed harvesting of paddy as it was another family picnic. We played hide and seek in and around haystacks. It was all so wonderful and beautiful as compared to life now. Today, when I see kids glued to TV, playing computer games, plugged to the musical net through ipod, I feel sorry for them for they are missing so much of the real world; they mostly know only the “virtual” world. So I wonder where Kalimpong would be in another 50 years’ time, same place but different people and very very advanced technology and very little of natural and real world, I wonder if our trees, rocks, school buildings and land would exist at all.

**God Bless Kalimpong!!** 🌄



"Men huffing and puffing and sweating like a horse is quite a satisfactory sight to see."

Sofia Chettri, 26

"After a tired day at the office, watching a football match at Mela Ground is a huge stress buster."

Urgen, 19

"It is a marvelous sight apart from the school parade on 15<sup>th</sup> August every year."

Minnie, 16

"Even if you are not playing the match you can feel your heart beating faster and anxiety kicked high."

Mina Lama, 26

"It's all about pure passion and putting one's entire heart and soul into the game."

Rahul Khatri, 17

"It is all about watching great team work."

Prayash, 12

"Friends come together after many long years and play the same game. It's a bit emotional."

Sarah, 25

"During the rainy season when there is a football match and the ground is all wet and muddy, its good to watch men getting dirty and breaking their bones."

Selina, 19

"It brings people together and binds them."

Wangchuk, 15

"It is all due to the high spirits of the game which leaves everyone with pumping blood."

Zena, 18

## Why do Kpgians love Football so much?

"Watching our locals play is just equivalent to watching Messi and Beckham play."

Trisha, 20

"I feel it's the bet that's worth. People bet on their favourite teams and enjoy whether they lose or win."

Priya, 22

"Football has a history of its own in Kpg. Our Kpgians love keeping the age old spirit alive."

Anniela, 20

"Some players at renowned clubs in India are the sons of Kpgians. So, we are proud of them."

Priyali, 15

"Its good to see men in jerseys and shorts. They look hot."

Jessica, 23

"Football gives a chance for only boys' fun with drinking plenty of beers and tongbas."

Aysh, 26

"We get to watch international matches just by being lazy at home. What more do we want???"

Ridzee, 24

"It's a legacy to carry on. If father plays sons inherit them."

Nilesh, 24

"It's a part of growing up for us boys. Childhood to teenage, teenage to youth and so on. We need BALLS"

Prajwal, 20

"If you want to be remembered for a very long time. Football is the right choice."

Dinesh, 19

"When you are grandfather its worth telling your grandkids, the story of olden golden glory days of the time when you were a hot football star in town."

Mahendra Sharma, 45

"Football season is all about cucumbers and dallay khorsani. Watching the game and munching cucumbers – A perfect delight!!!!"

Ayesha, 20

"I enjoy the bet with my brother, when I lose every time and he wins. I am happy at heart to see him smile."

Genelia, 15

"When there is a football match at Mela Ground, it's a perfect destination to head with your girlfriend/ spouse or a group of friends!!!!"

Adarsh, 24

"It brings families together as everyone gathers before the big flat screen at home."

Jayanti, 22

"Men flaunt themselves and act as if they are smart. A very good scene."

Jenica, 25

"Big fat guys make the scene worthwhile by adding some humour to the game."

Alisha, 19

"It's a great form of exercise which keeps you in perfect shape."

Kunal, 20



# SPY FOR TIBET

## FINDS KARMA IN TENNESSEE

This article was published in the Financial Times June 21, 2010

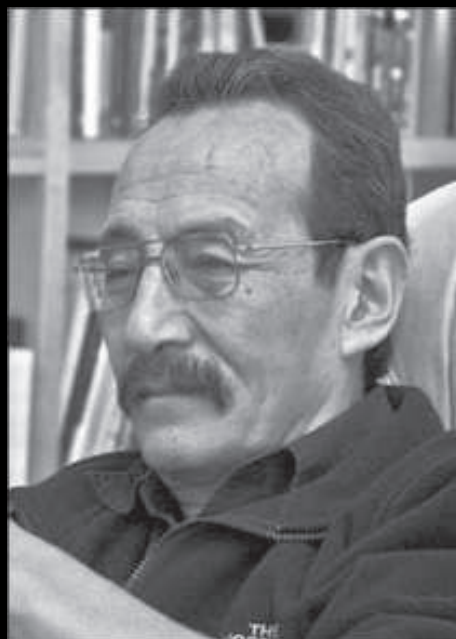
As told to Henry Hamman

**J**amyang Norbu: I was born in 1949 in Darjeeling, India. I arrived in Tibet three or four months after I was born, with my nanny, my mother and my father all on horseback. We returned to Darjeeling when I was three years old, after the Chinese invasion.

My first memories of Tibet were of problems in Darjeeling because of the friction and conflict in Tibet, after the Chinese invasion. My memories have been fortified by stories my mother told me. A lot of my memories are not reliable.

I was educated at a Jesuit school in Darjeeling, St Joseph's, the usual kind of English-language school in India at that time. I was there with the Dalai Lama's youngest brother and other Tibetans. Our most exalted alumni was Lawrence Durrell.

I became involved with the Tibetan resistance because of my father. He was the editor of the main newspaper for the Dalai Lama's older brother, the national paper, which existed because of CIA support. All the resistance people who were in Darjeeling at the time were involved with my father, so I got to know quite a few of them. I ran away from home because my father didn't want me to join the resistance. I tried three times to join. I was kicked out two times. The third time I was accepted by our chief of operations, Lhamo Tsering – my wife's late father, incidentally. I became involved in espionage because when the Americans pulled out their support, the Tibetans didn't have much money to keep up their



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networks in the Himalayas and Tibet. This was near the end of the Cultural Revolution and it was really important that we kept those networks open.

Going from India to Japan changed me tremendously. When I was working for the Tibetan government I was making nothing and suddenly I was making real money, saving quite a lot, and still living quite well, even keeping a house out in the country. In Japan the stationery alone was amazing – huge stores with so many colours, so many things people managed to think up. You saw a completely different world.

I knew an American crowd. We all were into betting on sumo. My teaching schedule was very light and I made a lot of money. At the same time I had a lot of Japanese friends, people who I'd helped. The Japanese have good memories. If you help, they feel obliged. They wrote about me. I don't have a degree worth speaking of but these guys wrote that this great Tibetan philosopher and writer was coming.

I lived in Scotland when I was married to an English girl. I'd lived in England a bit and there was always that "hail fellow" attitude. When I got to Scotland, what I liked about the place was that it was much more dour. But when you get to know Scots your relationship can be much more substantial. I used to go to Burns Nights and one thing that really appealed to me was the fact that Scotland's national hero was a poor poet. It really was very Japanese in one sense – the humbleness of it. Sometimes I would read "Ode to a

Haggis.” You know, Tibetans eat haggis too.

I came to Monteagle because my wife wanted to practice medicine in the US. Doctors get a visa to stay in this country if they agree to serve in what they call “under-served areas”. Grundy County needed a doctor at that time, so after she finished her residency in New York we came here. My wife often goes to work early to do her rounds, so first thing in the morning I brew a large mug of tea and write for an hour or so. Then I get my girls ready for school. I do some household chores and write until about one or two o’clock in the afternoon, and go to the gym. In the evenings, I try not to work too much but read or watch a movie.

I’m really grateful that I’m here in Monteagle and not in New York, where there would be a whole lot of Tibet stuff going on. I need solitude to write. Writing doesn’t come easily to me, so I would do anything but write.

I always loved southern writers, starting with Mark Twain. I always wanted to eat catfish after I read about Huckleberry Finn on that island with Jim. They got some catfish on a stick and grilled it on an open fire. That has always stayed in my mind: what a wonderfully delicious thing to do, to eat catfish and have some cornbread.

There are those words you never bother to look up; for instance, the word “chiffarobe”. I read it in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a*



**I became involved in espionage because when the Americans pulled out their support, the Tibetans didn’t have much money to keep up their networks in the Himalayas and Tibet.**

*Mockingbird*. Suddenly it struck me when I was buying furniture to ask the lady who was selling me furniture what in the world a “chiffarobe” was. It’s basically a cupboard.

All my good karma is settling here. When I take my kids to school there’s an old policeman who guides them across the road and kids jump up and smack him on the hand. You don’t lock your car door or your house. It’s a strange world – the old oak trees and all. I have this sense that I have been here before, that there was some connection I was longing for, and it’s

here.

- We’re privileged here – the school system is really wonderful and we have none of the problems of big cities. Our older daughter is in St Andrews-Sewanee, an Episcopal school, and her younger sister goes to the Sewanee elementary school. They’re both doing very well. We try not to buy anything made in China. The children have accepted this and the fact that nearly most toys these days are made in China. But they get to buy all the books all they want.

- Don’t talk politics the first time around with people you meet. We are at the intersection of a lot of different political thinking in this country and I think it is better to let other people talk about their ideas first. But don’t confine yourself to one group of people, especially in a place like Monteagle. Get out of your little group. To understand this place, you have to move around a little more.

FOLLOW HIMALAYAN TIMES ON

# FACEBOOK



## KALIMPONG GIRLS' HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL

**EDUCATING YOUNG MINDS  
SINCE MORE THAN A  
CENTURY**

### PARTY OFFICE



Looks like everyone is here seeking  
tickets for the forthcoming elections



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# TRAVEL

By Prakriti Prabha  
Chettri



**W**hen we first boarded the jeep from Kanchan cinema hall, it was raining like there was no tomorrow. The disappointment of not being able to watch the view on the way to Kaffer was sky soaring. It engulfed my spirits in its dark dreary dampness. Fortunately by the grace of God when we reached Relli the rain stopped and the weather started clearing and as we started climbing up in our packed jeep, I thanked the Gods for the rain. The brand new road (well four years old is new for a road) was glistening black due the wetness. The sun had also come up shyly tricking the clouds. Everything seemed fresh and new, bathed rigorously by the rain.

My spirits then finally began to soar happily. It was late afternoon and everything looked golden. It was breathtaking. The blue hills, Kalimpong playing peek a boo, the green grass swaying with

# A PERFECT GETAWAY.... KAFFER

the breeze and the smell of wet earth could have softened even the hardest of the heart. A pissed off lover would have certainly forgotten everything and would have forgiven his beloved happily. Such was the romantic affect!!! I just wanted it to go on!! As we drew closer to Kaffer the vegetation grew darker and so did the day as dusk was approaching. The fir trees seemed to have a story to tell of their own. Untold stories of the past. Untold stories of two sisters who may have played in the grass beneath the fir trees while on their errand to collect firewood. Stories of lovers who may have secretly met and shared stolen kisses. It was beautiful.

We reached Kaffer at around quarter to four and were immediately shown by a local to a hotel. After freshening up with cups of hot tea I had to take an evening walk. Kaffer, the main inhabited area is pretty small. As a matter of fact, tiny. The main town (if you could call it one) seemed to look like a film studio. Just a collection of buildings (you can actually count them) which all serve as hotels.

The top of the hill over the main town has a Y road and I decided to take the right one which led to the Forest Department. And woowwww!!! What a sight it was... one just had to look down from the road and everything would seem a fairytale. Lush green grass, Azaleas in full bloom everywhere, trees of such pixie height. It was paradise!!! A local who seemed bemused by my stupor proudly remarked that the shooting of *Darpan Chaya* was done there in that garden.

Hmmm...no doubt. It was so beautiful that I had to add it to my list of the most beautiful gardens that I had ever visited. But sadly I have to mention here that striking against this beauty was the burnt down bungalow and tiny one roomed cottages that must definitely been a source of pride as well as profit for the locals.

Then I decided to explore further. I walked down through charming roads with little puddles here and there. Wooden houses surrounded by flowers dotted the slopes. I walked down until I reached St Stephen's School affiliated to the ICSE Board. The imposing modern structure stood gallant against the rustic livery around. Built on the funds sent by the people of Luxemburg, this school provides quality education to the local children at a reasonable rate. The fact that I wasn't able visit the school during working hours will always be a life long lament. Having had the experience of being a teacher I love schools and children. It's amazing, the difference a good teacher can make through his or her teachings. And it was wonderful to see such endeavor, such a beautiful motive... education is the foundation of mans' progress. And if children are given the right kind of education in the way that befits them (a good teacher will always know the way of making a weak child learn no matter how impossible the task may seem)...the world will be a much better place.

Then we climbed our way up back to our hotel, but but but... I was lured by the intoxicating smell of "tongba" and had to give it a shot ;) . It was a nice home and they served me a bamboo jarful of steaming millet by the lamp

light. I had to insert the straw made with bamboo stem and draw out a sip. The first sip was delicious but musty, sweet but very strong, soothing but very tingling.... But the most important effect that I noticed was the reddening of the cheeks. Ok my rouge for evening was saved.. natural blushing... what more could a girl ask for!

Another thing that I got to save was a lonely hotel dinner. What could be better than being invited by a local family for dinner! The host and hostesses, Mr Purna Bahadur Gurung and his wife and sister in law were such charming people. We all got along immediately. The dinner was as good as gold. Authentic Nepali food comprising of “*bhat*” “*dal*” “*aludum*” *mula ko achar*” and “*jungali chew*” . I ate like a wolf. It was one of my most satisfying meal, my most memorable too. I’ll never forget the “*jungali chew*” or red wild mushroom local to Kaffer. I had never before seen it before. But once bitten, twice shy. I loved it. One more thing that I must add here is that the people of Kaffer all use the authentic “*chulah*” due to the abundance of firewood. It is present in every kitchen and every home; it works in dual ways, cooks food as well as gives warmth which is highly needed in that altitude.

After that lovely dinner there was nothing left to do but hit the sack. There were showing Gothika in a movie channel, but I was in no mood to watch Halle Berry in this sinister thriller. Thus I fell asleep with the determination to get up early in the morning to watch the sunrise. A night in Kaffer and no sunrise.... You’ve got to be joking!!! But the weather didn’t



seem benevolent, when I woke up; it was pouring cats and dogs. Had never ever started a day so early (around 3:30) in such disappointment.:(

After a snooze I woke up yet again, the rain had ceased but the fog was determined to torture me. After tea and breakfast I made towards the forest to see the Hanging Bridge. A narrow trail which led into the forest was damn and strewn with dead leaves of the brownest hue. After a slow careful walk, the bridge finally came into sight it was indeed hanging!!!! Suspended from mid air, it hung old and mysterious. Unfortunately my moment of pleasure was short as by then an army of leeches had slyly crept up my feet and legs and were sucking the joy out of me.

Therefore I quickly returned to the main town and enjoyed cups of tea in a small shop basking in the pleasant environment. Just calmly relaxed with nothing in particular in my mind. Kaffer is indeed a place to relax, especially for those yearning for some peace in nature. It is an abode of heavenly tranquility.

My bus via lava was at one in the afternoon, thus after a hearty lunch I boarded the vehicle with a sense of satisfaction and peace. The winding road with dense dark forest on both the sides gave me a feeling of how lucky I am to live in the hills of Darjeeling surrounded by nature in its most natural form. Sadly not everyone understands the importance of nature. I don’t know when people will learn not to throw plastic wrappers from the windows of the moving vehicle!!!!

We not only insult nature by doing so but also contribute to the environmental damage as well.

As we crossed Lava I was getting closer to Kalimpong thus closer to home. Returning home always has a charm of its own, you suddenly think of your mother, you think of home food, your warm cozy bed and it feels heavenly. I would go off on every weekend if I could just to enjoy this lovely feeling of returning home. So it was “hi Kalimpong” and “see you again Kaffer”. It was an amazing end to a perfect getaway. 🌄



## EXPRESSIONS

P.T. Bhutia,  
Raja Dhara,  
Kalimpong


# TO HUMANITY

---

The plight of poor mortal being  
Can never by me been seen.  
Your Cruel work, a thunder,  
Rends my soft heart asunder.  
My mind's eyes with tears are filled  
Though it by God was not willed.

In a bout of selfishness,  
You set aside your calmness  
To commit the Primal Sin.  
God then at pains was seen.  
Twas God's only masterpiece  
Who denied the Master's wish.  
Eating the forbidden fruit  
You proved yourself to be rude  
And, the divine innocence  
Fled apace from human sense.  
Your conceit and arrogance  
Have welcomed God's abhorrence.  
In heinous act of exploiting  
The nature, you're committing

Yet another human sin,  
Graver than the Primal Sin.  
Oh! The nature is battered.  
God's dreams are almost shattered.  
Hark! Stop be not fool again  
For your ephemeral gain.

In your thought and action done  
Sow the seeds of compassion,  
Respect, love and affection-  
With a lot of devotion-  
A noble gesture it'll be  
O' submission to God, you see.  
It'll be your great confession  
To avert God's damnation.  
When you have realized it, Man,  
With all your head, heart and hand,  
An aura of ample grace  
Exudes at once from your face,  
And the Wasteland of your heart  
Evolves into divine art. 



# 10 Questions



**MRS. SARITA RAI**

## 1. Your childhood days .....

I was born in Sukhia Pokhari Darjeeling in 1957. I was the second child in the family. Both my parents were teachers so I was brought up in a cultured and school like disciplined manner along with my two siblings. I feel very privileged when I look back at my childhood days. We even got the opportunity to go to Hong Kong when my father was asked to serve at the Gorkha Children School under the British Army. We later shifted to Brunei and then came back except for my father who had to continue his service.

## 2. You are a teacher as well as seen in the political field.....

At first it was difficult but the management at the school was co-operative. I was nervous to start off in the political field but was committed to serve but more as a social worker than a politician. My late husband is my source of inspiration as he was himself in the political field. I am grateful to Mr. Bimal Gurung for giving me such a great opportunity and also to the School Management for being so thoughtful.

## 3. Your say on Literature, Music and Love.....

These things are basic things for humans without which everything in life would seem too monotonous. They color and brighten the lives of people and adds a positive attitude in facing the challenges in life.

## 4. Your opinion on the present situation of K.P.G.....

Kalimpong is the best place in terms of education among the three hill sub-divisions. People outside Kalimpong also come and study here. But the youth move out for further

studies or the prospect of better jobs and when they return many years later, not only the body of the person but also their talent is drained by then. It is a loss to our society when youngsters move to other places for jobs. But it's always good to come back after completing one's education to serve one's birthplace.

## 5. An author whose work is a great influence.....

I have read a lot of works by many authors like Khalid Hussein's "Without Mercy", Chetan Bhagat's "Two States", Shobha De's "Speed Post" and many more. I also like the works of Jhamak Ghimiray of Nepal. In Nepali Literature Parijat has been on the top list of influencing authors. She was a person with never ending courage and strength despite her illness. These qualities have been reflected in her writings in a very strong manner.

## 6. Your life so far.....

Not always colorful... The days back at school and college were fun. My husband was very co-operative. He was the eldest son in the family and I was the eldest daughter-in-law so, we had plenty of responsibilities to fulfill. My husband passed

away on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2007. It was devastating I had felt although I had lost everything but I had to move on. I was determined to take all the responsibilities and gather myself to start again with a renewed spirit. And I am satisfied with my work – whatsoever I have done so far.

## 7. Your role Model/inspiration.....

My parents. A big credit goes to my father who was an excellent teacher. He inspired me to be a teacher and give the very best to my profession. My husband has also been a great source of inspiration. He had deep faith in social work. The people at our place always came to him for solutions to their problems. These people also encourage me to carry on with the kind of social work that my husband had always believed in.

## 8. Drug Addiction and our future pillars.....

Drug addiction and Alcoholism are like diseases. Young people are more inclined to addiction. Full family support is required in helping out these people. Even youngsters from good families are into these habits. Maybe they are searching for the lost attention from their parents. But young and responsible people still exist. So, there's hope.

## 9. If you were not a teacher.....

A good social worker working for the deprived women and children of our society. Extending a loving hand to people in need of the greatest generosity. Another option would be to be a very good housewife.

## 10. Some words for Himalayan Times.

Himalayan Times is doing a great job. The articles in Himalayan Times reflect our society. The ideas of various personalities are spread through their interviews. I wish every success to Himalayan Times.



## THE COOKING DIARIES

By Prakriti Prabha Chettri

Little had I known that my regular trips to the *Haat bazaar* would actually take me a home just in its fringes for “The Cooking Diaries “. Having lived all my life in a spacious area with a lawn and quite a stretch of maize fields that engulfs everything in a jungle during the monsoons, it was quite exciting to be invited to the lovely home of Mrs. Lopchand just below the *Haat bazaar*. A teacher by profession, her husky voice and influencing personality satiated my thirst for company, while her daughter in law, a lovely lady with a smile that could light a dozen lamps, was the cook for the day.

Once through the main door of their house amidst houses, it was a completely different world. The living room had wooden panels right up to the ceiling which was wooden too. Huge widows adorned the wall facing the street and the carpeted floor and wooden shelves with adorable figures and decorative pieces peeping shyly all added to this divine afternoon. It was in this lovely room I was served cheese *pokoras*, *panner* fries and fried *papad* but in a way that I had never eaten before, nor had imagined to. The *papads* were filled with mashed potatoes with a strong blend of garlic and ginger paste and then deep fried. (Who cares about calories when such magical things are melting in your mouth)! Unabashedly I gobbled up all the cheese *pokoras*. I have to admit here that I’m quite shameless when it comes to eating. Sometimes I don’t even know if the other person next to me has even had a share of what I have gobbled up like a hungry wolf.

Mrs Lopchand had amazing things to share along with food, pitchers of ageless wisdom and grace. And each time I meet someone new I’m always learning, learning material things as well as spiritual. It is amazing how one can grasp divinity by just sharing ones knowledge with each other. “There is nothing more sacred than knowledge”. I imagine knowledge in me growing like a tree,

sprouting from a tiny seed thrusting itself from the soil to breathe fresh air and then growing shoot by shoot, leaf by leaf.... Always growing bigger, always growing greener...

When lunch was announced and we were shown downstairs, I was full with knowledge and cheese *pokoras*. It was a heavenly combination. But I had to make some space for the main course so with an imaginary feeling of hunger I sat down at the



table. It was a kitchen cum dining room and as cozy as one could imagine. Mrs Lama’s inviting smile was very appetizing and suddenly I felt that I could gobble yet again.

There was vegetable fried rice made from “*mug mug basnah awney busty ko chamal*”, of which the aroma had me in intense desire. It is the feeling that the rice may have come from a “*dhikuti*” with a earthen floor which makes it more desirable. There was “*alu ra til sadheko*” or potatoes made with ground sesame seeds. This Nepali dish has always been my favourite and I make it quite often at home, but with groundnuts, as I find roasting the sesame seeds very challenging. This dish is prepared by just adding ground sesame seeds to boiled potatoes and seasoning it.

Then there was Manchurian balls made with button mushrooms, veggies and corn flour and fried before being dipped into the lovely gravy of veggies and corn flour. It had a lovely leathery feel that was intensely good to the tongue and the teeth. But my most favourite was the dish that tasted and smelled like fish curry but was actually prepared with “*besan*”. According to Mrs Lama she first made a batter out of “*besan*” and then fried them like pancakes. Then these pancakes were rolled and sliced into long pieces and then

slipped into gravy made with ingredients that are used for fish curry. Conniving huh!!! A nice way of tricking both the veggies and the non veggies!!!! Then there was raddish salad made with “*churpi*”. That is a must!!!!

Mrs Lama had also prepared a sensational roasted chicken. A lovely golden crust on the outside while soft and tender inside.

The oven can do wonders to anything put into it!!!! I’ve always had a weakness for anything that comes out from the oven. I would suggest roasting potatoes or carrots or any veggies for the matter along with the chicken. The veggies will bake beautifully in the extra fat on the oven tray.

To finish it up we had custard truffle. Layers of delicious flavor. At the base was a thin slice of fruit cake which was covered with custard and fruits and topped off with cream. It was exquisite and what I most loved was the blend of fresh fruits that balanced the sweetness perfectly. Mrs lama’s son seemed to enjoy it more than I. And once we surrender to sweetness there is no going back. It was indeed a very sweet end to a wonderful lunch.

Then after a cup of tea an hour later and a very gossipy chat with Mrs Lama, it was time to leave. Unfortunately all good things must come to an end. Goodbyes with smile were exchanged along with my “thankyous”. I had made new friends. It was a warm feeling and very comforting. As I walked out (I had almost forgotten where I was) KPG was in the middle of a Saturday evening chaos. After much bumping I got into a cab which drove me back into my quite home.

And as days pass I realize how small moments add to our book of memories. We write pages and pages on them endlessly. Everyday there is something new to write. Everyday there is something new to feel. Everyday there is something new to see. One needn’t be a writer or a thinker. One needn’t even be an important person. One just need to be oneself. Just a human with a heart to love, care and cherish.

Till my next invite..

Bon appetite 🍴



**Dr. Sonam B. Wangyel**

# RECALLING KALIMPONG

## TIGERS IN KALIMPONG

**I**n the late 1940s and early 50s a certain Roy Harding was a student at the Dr. Graham's Homes of Kalimpong. He recently wrote an essay about his school life in the Newsletter (Spring 2006) of the Kalimpong Association, UK. Most of the routines and the administrative system were very much similar to my times in the late 1960s. However, with the passage of time, several inevitable small changes had gradually slipped in.

Before our independence the institute was St. Andrew's Colonial Homes and keeping in pace with the changed political scenario and to honour the founder, after India's independence, it had become Dr. Graham's Homes. Even the English lion perched on the school crest had been replaced with the royal Bengal tiger. In the days of Harding they had the Cadet Force and in my times it was the National Cadet Corps. They had real rifles and so did we (probably they had used the same 303 rifles we were using) but unlike them the school band was not part of the NCC. By the time I was finishing school survival was very much a cerebral matter but in Harding's days it appears that a bit of physical proficiency was also necessary. So they were taught how to sew and knit, help with the cooking and go to the forest to pick berries and collect firewood. Little boys would bring back to their cottage buckets filled with strawberries and raspberries which were sent to the hospital to be made into ice-creams and jams and distributed to the cottages. The children were even given small allotments where they could grow stuffs like peanuts which, when ripe and ready, could be exchanged for other stuffs or given to the house parents (wardens) for a small pocket money. These were all to change with the times but the most dramatic of them, which many young readers will have difficulty in believing, was the appearance of tigers in places as high as the Homes. Harding recalls the tiger sightings with certain fondness and great clarity. During the hot seasons in the plains tigers, and Harding claims they were generally females, came up to the hills and some of them strayed into the woods near his cottage. During such times and until the tigers returned to the plains, the children were forbidden to enter the jungle and so were let off from collecting berries and firewood. He writes, "On occasions, usually on a moonlit night we would be woken up from sleep to see a tigress and her cubs leisurely walking past our cottages. It was an awesome sight and one that I have never forgotten."

By the time I got into the Homes the only tigers we saw were the huge life-sized paintings of the Royal Bengal Felines done by the famous artist Stanley Robbins. I often wonder whether Robbins' fondness for painting Tigers could have been inspired by those tiger sightings. Anyway, in my time the only wild life we got to hear, never saw, were the distant piercing calls of the foxes in the quiet depths of the night. It is almost forty years since then and the wolves too seem to have disappeared. In fact in my last visit to Kalimpong the only wild life or a late night holler I was treated to was a badly inebriated person, taking the road to his home, wildly serenading a bawdy song. ■





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